

THE EFFECT OF BIOCHAR ON GROWTH AND YIELD OF WHEAT PLANT UNDER DROUGHT CONDITIONS

By

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ABSTRACT

Wesam Mansour Ahmed Negm: The Effect of Biochar on Growth and Yield of Wheat Plant Under Drought Conditions. Unpublished M. Sci. Thesis, Agric. Botany Department, Fac. of Agric., Ain Shams Univ., 2019.

Implementation of adaptive measures to resilience agroecosystems to drought is one of the key tasks of green biotechnology to sustain crop yields. Recently, biochar soil amendment has emerged as a feasible win-win strategy to enhance crop productivity, especially under limited water availability, and to mitigate greenhouse gasses emission. This study aimed, therefore, to determine the effects of biochar soil application on the growth, development and yield of wheat (*Triticum aestivum* L.) plants grown under different water regimes. A completely randomized greenhouse pot trial was conducted using three levels of biochar addition (0, 2 and 5% BC) to a sandy soil under different water regimes [60%, 30% and 15% of the soil water holding capacity (WHC)]. Overall, growth-related parameters measured in this study were negatively influenced by drought, the effect that was more pronounced at 15% WHC. Drought stress decreased the total plant biomass by 65% and 72% at moderate and severe drought stress treatment, respectively, compared to well-watered controls. The number of tillers per plant was significantly reduced by 66% and 73%, and that of the leaves by 58% and 74% in plants grown at 30% and 15% WHC, respectively. Leaf area per leaf was also reduced, being only 62% and 56% of that of the controls at moderate and severe drought stress, respectively. Drought-induced growth inhibition was associated with an impaired plant water balance (indicated by lower LRWC and ψ_s), ion imbalance (indicated by reduced K^+ , relatively lower N and higher Mg^{2+} and Ca^{2+} contents), reduced photosynthetic pigments, enhanced LEL and higher proline concentrations in both the root and shoot tissues. Water stress markedly decreased all yield-contributing parameters, leading consequently to

reduce the grain yield per plant by 70% and 97% at moderate and severe water stress, respectively, compared to well-watered controls.

BC soil application at either 2% or 5% substantially improved wheat growth and productivity, both under sufficient and limited water supply. At ample water regime, BC resulted in substantial increases of about 183% and 100% in total plant biomass when applied at 2% and 5%, respectively, compared to non-amended controls. BC-induced improvements in plant biomass were coincided with significant increases in plant height and numbers of tillers and leaves per plant. Most interestingly, BC-treated plants showed conspicuous growth even under severe drought conditions, confirming the potential of BC in enhancing plant drought resistance. BC applied at 2% increased the plant biomass by up to 400% and 80% at moderate and severe water stress treatments, respectively, compared to un-amended controls. Similarly, BC applied at 5% led to increase the plant fresh weight by 220% and 58% at moderate and severe drought stress treatment, respectively. The beneficial effects of adding BC were also manifested by 137% and 107% increases in the grain yield (GYPP), when BC was applied at 2% or 5%, respectively, under normal irrigation treatment. The interactive effect of drought and BC treatments was highly significant, as BC application at 2 and 5% increased the GYPP by roughly 317% and 308%, respectively, for plants exposed to moderate water stress. Under severe drought, BC applied at 2 and 5% caused up to 6.7 and 1.6 folds increases in the GYPP, respectively. Taken together, these results indicate that 2% BC could be an optimal level to sustain wheat growth and productivity, at least under our experimental conditions, both under ample and limited water supply. BC-mediated growth stimulation might be attributed to its positive effects on the physical and chemical properties of the soil (improved soil WHC, and nutrient contents). This ultimately contributed to an enhanced plant water status (higher ψ_s and LRWC) as well as a better plant nutrient uptake (mainly, K^+ , Mg^{2+} and N contents). Our results indicated clearly that drought-induced disorders in plant growth, physiology and hence

productivity of wheat could be ameliorated by BC soil application, with 2% BC was most effective, particularly at severe drought stress conditions. These results justify the potentials of biochar as a novel approach for improving wheat productivity and could be considered as a step forward for its use to sustain crop production, particularly, at marginal areas of Egypt.

Keywords: Wheat, Drought, Biochar, Soil amendment, Plant growth, Grain yield, Water balance, Nutrients, Osmotic adjustment, Photosynthetic pigments

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CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES	IV
LIST OF FIGURES.....	V
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	4
2.1. Drought effects on plants	5
2.1.1. Effect of drought on plant growth and yield.	5
2.1.2. Effect of drought on water relations.	8
2.1.3. Effect of drought on photosynthesis.	9
2.1.4. Effect of drought on nutrient uptake.	10
2.2. Drought resistance mechanisms.	10
2.2.1. Morphological adaptations.	11
2.2.1.1. Drought escape.	11
2.2.1.2. Drought avoidance.	11
2.2.1.3. Phenotypic flexibility.	11
2.2.2. Physiological mechanisms.	12
2.2.2.1. Cell and tissue water conservation.	12
2.2.2.2. Antioxidant defense.	13
2.2.2.3. Cell membrane stability.	13
2.3. Managing drought: strategies to increase agricultural productivity under drought conditions.	14
2.3.1. Classical selection and breeding strategies.	14
2.3.2. Biotechnology and genomic manipulation.	14
2.3.3. Exogenous application of hormones and osmoprotectants.	15
2.3.4. Soil conditioners.	16
2.3.5. Biochar (BC) as soil amendment.	17
2.3.5.1. Effect of biochar addition on soil properties.	19
2.3.5.1.1. Soil physical properties.	19
2.3.5.1.2. Soil chemical properties.	20
2.3.5.1.3. Soil biological properties.	20
2.3.5.2. Nutrient availability.	21

2.3.5.3. Influence of biochar addition on water relation.	23
2.3.5.4. Influence of biochar addition on photosynthesis.	24
2.3.5.5. Influence of biochar addition on crop growth and yield.	25
3. MATERIAL AND METHODS	28
3.1. Biochar preparation and soil mixtures.	28
3.2. Characterization of biochar and soil-biochar mixtures.	30
3.3. Experimental setup, plant materials, cultivation and growth conditions.	31
3.4. Harvest procedure and agronomic traits.	34
3.5. Physiological and biochemical traits.	35
3.5.1. Determination of leaf relative water content (LRWC).	35
3.5.2. Determination of osmotic potential (Ψ_s).	36
3.5.3. Determination of leaf electrolyte ion leakage (LEL).	36
3.5.4. Determination of mineral elements.	37
3.5.5. Determination of photosynthetic pigments.	37
3.5.6. Determination of proline.	38
3.5.7. Determination of total soluble carbohydrates (TSC).	38
3.6. Statistical Analysis.	39
4. RESULTS	40
4.1. Properties of biochar and soil mixtures	40
4.2. Plant growth and development.	44
4.2.1. Visual observations.	44
4.2.2. Plant growth attributes and agronomic traits.	46
4.2.2.1. Plant fresh weight.	46
4.2.2.2. Shoot: root fresh weight ratio.	46
4.2.2.3. Plant height.	49
4.2.2.4. Tillering.	49
4.2.2.5. Leaf number.	50
4.2.2.6. Leaf area.	51
4.2.2.7. Leaf mass to area (LMA) ratio.	51
4.3. Physiological traits.	52
4.3.1. Dry weight.	52

III

4.3.2. Relative water content.	54
4.3.3. Ion leakage.	54
4.3.4. Osmotic potential.	56
4.3.5. Photosynthetic pigments.	58
4.3.6. Mineral ions concentrations.	60
4.3.6.1. Potassium (K^+) concentrations.	60
4.3.6.2. Calcium (Ca^{2+}) concentrations.	62
4.3.6.3. Magnesium (Mg^{2+}) concentrations.	64
4.3.7. Total nitrogen content.	64
4.3.8. Total soluble carbohydrate.	67
4.3.9. Proline concentration.	69
4.4. Yield and its attributes.	69
5. DISCUSSION.....	75
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION.....	103
REFERENCES.....	108
ARABIC SUMMARY	

LIST OF TABLES

No.		Page
1	Some chemical and physical characters of the biochar produced and used in the present study.	41
2	Chemical and physical characterizations and elemental composition of the experimental soil mixtures used in the study.	43
3	Effect of different soil water content (Ctr., 30% and 15% WHC) and various levels of biochar (0%, 2% and 5% BC) soil application on shoot to root fresh weight ratio, plant height, number of tillers per plant, leaf number per plant, leaf area per leaf and leaf mass to area ratio (LMA) of wheat plants.	48
4	Influence of different soil water regimes (WHC) and various levels of biochar (BC) soil application on the spike number per plant, spike length, spike weight per spike, grain yield per plant and weight of 1000 grains of wheat plants.	73

LIST OF FIGURES

No.		Page
1	Feedstock used for biochar production (A), using a locally manufactured pyrolytic unit based on Anila Stove design (B) and the charred materials obtained from this home-mad unit (C).	29
2	Experimental pots after they were filled with soil mixtures (10 kg each) and before sowing. Note the difference in soil surface color from sand (A) to sand+2%BC (B) and sand+5% BC (C).	29
3	An overview of the experimental layout showing the variations between different levels of water supply (Ctr., 30% and 15% WHC) and biochar soil application (0%, 2% and 5% BC) treatments on plant growth and development of wheat plants, which were evident five weeks after the initiation of drought stress treatments.	32
4	Effects of biochar soil application rates 0% (A), 2% (B) and 5% (C) on the growth, performance and development of wheat plants exposed to different soil water contents (Ctr., 30% and 15% WHC), 12 weeks after drought stress commencement.	45
5	Influence of different levels of biochar soil application (0%, 2% and 5% BC) on plant growth and biomass accumulation (expressed as fresh weight) of wheat plants exposed to various levels of soil water content (60%, 30% and 15% WHC).	47
6	Effects of different levels of biochar soil application (0%, 2% and 5% BC) on the dry matter accumulation (expressed as dw % fw) of the root (A) and shoot (B) of wheat plants grown at various soil water contents (60%, 30% and	53

No.		Page
	15%WHC).	
7	Leaf relative water content (LRWC) as affected by different soil water contents (60%, 30% and 15% WHC) and various levels of biochar (0%, 2% and 5% BC) soil application.	55
8	Ion leakage of the fully expanded leaves of wheat plants subjected to different levels of soil water content (60%, 30%, 15% WHC) at various levels of biochar (0%, 2% and 5% BC) soil application.	55
9	Osmotic potential (Ψ s) of the root (A) and shoot (B) tissues of wheat plants exposed to different soil water contents (60%, 30% and 15% WHC) and various levels of biochar (0%, 2% and 5% BC) soil application.	56
10	Effects of different biochar levels (0%, 2% and 5% BC) on the photosynthetic pigments of the fully expanded juvenile leaves of wheat plants subjected to various levels of soil water content (60%, 30% and 15% WHC). (A) chlorophyll (a) and (B) chlorophyll (b) concentrations in mg g^{-1} fw.	58
11	Potassium (K^+) concentrations of the roots (A) and shoots (B) of wheat plants grown under different levels of soil water content (60%, 30% and 15% WHC) and various levels of biochar (0%, 2% and 5% BC) soil application.	60
12	Calcium (Ca^{2+}) concentrations of the roots (A) and shoots (B) of wheat plants grown under different levels of soil water content (60%, 30% and 15% WHC) and various levels of biochar (0%, 2% and 5% BC) soil application.	63
13	Magnesium (Mg^{2+}) concentrations of the roots (A) and shoots (B) of wheat plants grown under different levels of soil water content (60%, 30% and 15% WHC) and various levels of biochar (0%, 2% and 5% BC) soil application.	65
14	Total nitrogen concentrations of the roots (A) and shoots (B) of wheat plants exposed to different soil water contents	66

VII

No.		Page
	(60%, 30% and 15% WHC) and various levels of biochar (0%, 2% and 5% BC) soil application.	
15	Total soluble carbohydrate (TSC) concentrations of the roots (A) and shoots (B) of wheat plants grown under different soil water contents (60%, 30% and 15% WHC) and various levels of biochar (0%, 2% and 5% BC) soil application.	68
16	Proline concentrations of the roots (A) and shoots (B) of wheat plants grown under different soil water contents (60%, 30% and 15% WHC) and various levels of biochar (0%, 2% and 5% BC) soil application.	70

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABA	Abscisic acid
AMF	Arbuscular mycorrhizal fungal
APX	Ascorbate peroxidase
ARC	Agriculture research center
BC	Biochar
CEC	Cation exchange capacity
Chl(a)	Chlorophyll (a)
Chl(b)	Chlorophyll (b)
Cks	Cytokinins
Ctr.	Control
DW	Dry weight
EC	Electrical conductivity
FW	Fresh weight (Weighed instantly)
GA3	Gibberellic acid
GB	Glycine betaine
GHG	Greenhouse gases
GR	Glutathione reductase
GYPP	Grain yield per plant
IAA	Indole acetic acid
IBI	The International Biochar Initiative
ICP	Inductively coupled plasma atomic emission spectrophotometer).
LEL	Leaf electrolyte (ion) leakage
LHC	Light-harvesting complex
LMA	Leaf mass to area ratio
LRWC	Leaf relative water content
MD	Moderate drought
OA	Osmotic adjustment
PAs	Polyamines
PEP	Phosphoenol pyruvate
PGRs	plant growth reulators